DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 100 EA 005 843

AUTHOR Nostrand, Peter F.; Shelly, Richard W.
TITLE An Educational Leadership Listening Model.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Personnel; Administrator Guides; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Leaders Guides; Leadership Qualities; Leadership Training; Listening; *Listening Comprehension; Listening Habits; *Listening Skills; *Models

ABSTRACT

The model developed here has been designed to help educators become better listeners and thereby better leaders. The model is broken down into an active and a post-active phase. The active phase covers the period of time during which active verbal intercourse is in progress. Concentrative listening, the first skill in the active phase, is that skill through which the listener focuses and maintains his attention on the verbal input. The second skill, appreciative listening, is a humanistic component in which the listener attempts to comprehend the verbalizer's perception of his communication. The post-active phase begins when the speaker has completed his verbalization. Included in this phase are three listening components: (1) analytic (the listener classifies material received as either relevant or irrelevant), (2) critical (the listener appraises each relevant piece of information received), and (3) creative (the listener synthesizes and evaluates what he has received). Several diagrams of the listening model are included. (Author/DN)

ED 087100

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP LISTENING MODEL

By

Peter F. Nostrand and Richard W. Shelly

Graduate School of Education

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Virginia

1973

EA 005 843

Introduction:

Undoubtedly the skill which any school administrator uses most is unfortunately that skill which is rarely effectively exercised or consciously improved: listening. Most of us are not aware that this essential ability can be quite significantly sharpened to the extent that any educational leader could very conceivably improve not only his ability to listen but also, as a result, his ability to speak and to raise pertinent questions, and, most important of all, his ability to effectively fulfill the educational leadership role needed by his social organization. Adequate fulfillment of this role is clearly pivotal to good communication.

To date, most of the research on listening has focused on the physiological and psychological processes involved in message reception and on scattered, unconnecred listening skills. However, effective listening is not merely a simple skill or a simple process. It is an additive series of abilities which occur not only during the actual face-to-face verbal exchange, but also after the termination of this exchange. Listening, to a large extent, is then a form of thinking over inner recordings of past communication.

There are five basic listening skills of which we feel the educational leader should be aware. It is our strong conviction that with the assistance of any of several now existent evaluative tools and instructional devices, any administrator who cares to take the time will be able to improve any or all of these five abilities and thereby increase his effectiveness as a school leader. To best describe these

five skills, we submit the following definitions and model. It must be noted that the nature of a model, schematic or paradigm is not meant to be all-encompassing, but simply to point out the main features of a relationship or set of relationships. This particular listening model is broken down into two major sub-divisions: (1) the active phase and 2) the post-active phase.

THE ACTIVE PHASE: THE REALM OF COMPREHENSION

The active phase involves the period of active verbal intercourse. It is our contention that during this phase, the educatonal leader should attempt to mentally "record" or "store" communication input in the form of message comprehension. By comprehension we do not require that the listener mentally retain the message in its original verbal form, but rather that he retain the ideas which the words initially conveyed. We therefore maintain that words are simply the vehicles for ideas and that they are in and of themselves of little value.

There is an objective or neutral component operating here in which the listener should attempt to absorb as much of what is being said as possible. The primary caution is to avoid "masking", "turning off", or "blocking" any part of the communication because of value judgement, ego-involvement, or listener-bias. "Thinking ahead" of the verbalizer is also contrary to optimum "recording" or "storing."

Implicit in the active phase is the listener's ability to comprehend ideas, concepts, and feelings being verbalized to him. In the flow diagram on page 12, we denote the process of "total input recording." This "total input" is limited to the listener's ability to understand what is being said. The listener must be able to in-

tegrate the ideas and concepts in the verbal input into his own experiential and cognitive base. For example, an esoteric discussion of nuclear physics is "lost" to the layman. In other words the input is not within his realm of comprehension and this realm, therefore, acts as an "input limiting factor."

Narrowly defined, the model is effectively set into motion when clear comprehension exists. Inadequate comprehension at this first stage may result in inadequate output at the completion of the model. Therefore, clarifying questions are an important "pre-model" component. In other words, if the listener fails to understand the ideas being verbalized, he should ask clarifying questions in order to more nearly approximate the totality of the input. Generally, then, the more comprehensive the input, the more accurate the output.

CONCENTRATIVE LISTENING

Concentrative listening, the first skill in the active phase, is that skill by which the listener may focus his attention and maintain that attention upon the verbal input. It is the listener's ability to concentrate on what is being said. Concentrative listening, then, is necessary to retain and enhance message comprehension.

APPRECIATIVE LISTENING

Appreciative listening may be considered as a subset of concentrative listening insofar as empathy with what the speaker is saying is dependent upon the listener's sustained attention or "concentrative" ability and his realm of comprehension. Appreciative listening, then, is a humanistic component in which the listener attempts to comprehend

the verbalizer's perception of his communication in addition to simply concentrating on what the message means.

For example, if a parent approached an educational leader in order to complain about his student's grades, an effective listener would be one who attempts not only to cognitively comprehend the message but also to understand the parent's affective frame of reference. What does the parent think he means? What is his viewpoint?

Before leaving the discussion of the active phase of this model, we should affirm our belief that the listening abilities specified in this phase should become necessary behavioral parameters for qualification of an educator in the role of an educational leader. The ability to absorb and comprehend input from community representatives, parents, teachers, and students is vital to the listener's role as an effective educational leader.

THE POST-ACTIVE PHASE

The second major sub-division of our model is what we have termed the "post-active" phase. Included in this phase are three listening components: 1) analytic listening, 2) critical listening and, 3) creative listening. The writers suggest that this post-active phase is set into motion at the completion of the verbal exchange and the active listening process. In other words, the active phase of this model suggests that the listener wait until the speaker has completed his verbalization before the listener proceeds into the post-active state. According to this model, then, the effective listener is not one who interrupts but rather is one who allows the speaker to verbalize the entire message before deeming the message or any portion thereof as either relevant or

irrelevant.

Before proceeding we must note that the post-active phase is not purely contemplative and meditative in nature insofar as it must be done in solitude; rather, these components are initiated at the completion of the verbal exchange, whether during a pause in the conversation or after the communicators have physically parted company. The essence of the post-active porcess is a reflection on the totality of input during the foregoing active process.

The post-active phase, composed of the analytical, critical, creative sequence assumes a systems approach orientation upon closer inspection. Each component functions both independently and interdependently. They are independent insofar as each type of listening is focused upon a unique outcome, and interdependent due to each component's dependence upon the proper and sequential functioning of the preceding component(s). More simply, the output of one component is the input of the next. The stimulus for analytical listening must come at the completion of the active process. The stimulus for critical listening is the output of analytic listening. The stimulus for creative listening is the output of critical listening. Each component is sequential, interdependent and yet, in a sense, independent in terms of its own unique output.

ANALYTIC LISTENING

The analytic listening component may be operationally defined as a sorting or sifting process in which the input or portions thereof from the active phase may be classified as either relevant or irrelevant by the listener. While we realize that pure objectivity with

respect to the determination of relevancy or irrelevancy is impossible, we submit, however, that the listener who effectively uses the analytic listening skill is one who "non-subjectively" or "neutrally" distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant portions of the total verbal input. While we must acknowledge that values and valuing are operating here, an effective listener is not one who will discard as irrelevant any portion of the total verbal input with which he is not in agreement. Therefore, personal bias and ego involvement will not shunt to the irrelevant portions as a defense mechanism certain ideas which should bear directly upon the total relevant input.

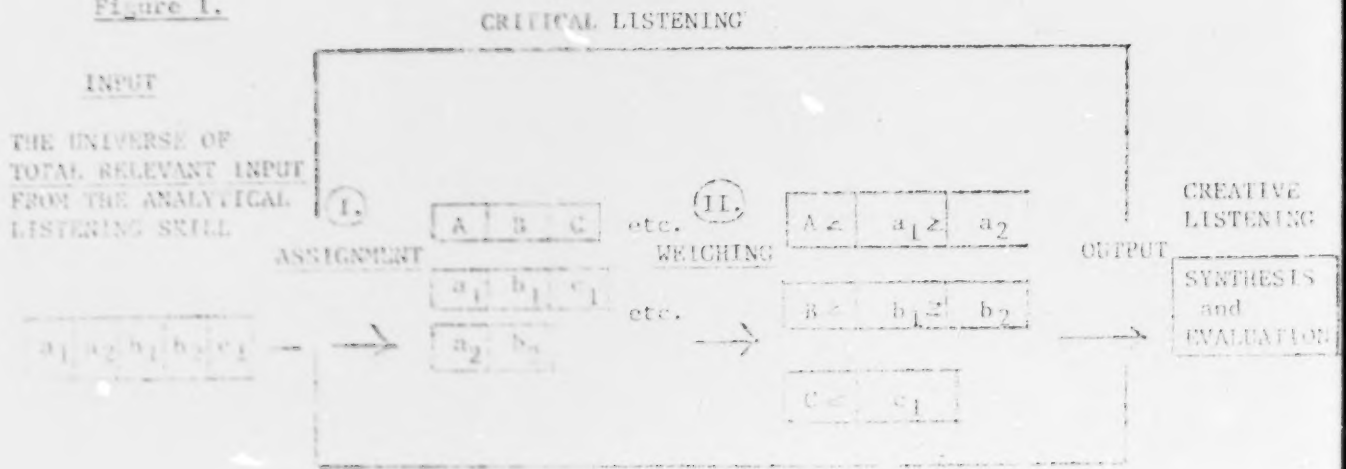
In addition to the obvious task of discarding social niceties and amenities, it is incumbent upon the listener to consciously attempt to refrain from discarding as irrelevant any input portions which may appear as either alien or threatening. The output, then, of the analytic listening skill is the universe of total relevant input portions with respect to topics, issues, or questions.

It should be noted that implicit in our mode is the understanding that there may be "topic input" into the process on the part of the listener during the analytic component of the model. Deciding what is "relevant" input is predicated upon the question "relevant to what?" In our case the answer would be "to topics, issues, or questions." These items may be either extrinsic, i.e., presented verbally by the person speaking or intrinsic, i.e., developed by the listener as having some bearing upon comments made or implied. In other words, there may be a listener input as well as verbalizer input. This listener input may be in the form of topics, issues, or questions to which some relevancy from the verbal input may be assigned.

CRITICAL LISTENING

At the completion of the analytic skill, the second, or critical, listening component is triggered. An operational definition of critical listening would include the listener's appraisal of each relevant portion of total relevant input gleaned from the previous analytic phase. Although critical listening is largely a subjective process of assignment and weighing, there is a quantitative as well as a qualitative aspect operating here. How relevant were the speaker's comments to this issue or that question? What degree of relevance does this particular comment have to the question at hand or could it be applied more postively to another parameter? It should be noted that the topics and the total relevant input are supplied to the critical phase for processing. This processing involves selection out of the total relevant input, portions of input which bear relevancy to a particular topic, issue, or question, and weighing the relevancy of a selected relevant input portion with respect to a topic. In other words, what portions of the relevant input relate to which topics and how closely does it correlate with the topic? We submit, then, for further clarification the following diagram and example which schematically represents what occurs within the critical listening skill. See Figure 1.

Figure 1.



Following the total relevant input contributed by the analytic listening skill the listener then assigns certain portions of the universe of total relevant input to topics which have been stated or implied in the verbalization (I.) By doing so the listener can then focus upon each topic and its concomitant input(s) in order to more effectively weigh the degree of correlation which the listener finds existent between those relevant input portions and the topic (II.) The primary correlation to be drawn is the degree of relationship which exists between the topic and any particular input portions(s), e.g. how relevant are a_1 and a_2 with respect to A? A resultant incidental correlation is that which exists between the verbal input portions themselves, e.g. the correlation which exists between a_1 and a_2. A concerete example would be an event in which an individual expressed several concerns or ideas related to the issue of busing. Once these input portions have been assigned to the topic of busing by a listener, he must then determine the degree of relevance existing between the speaker's ideas and the topic of busing, e.g. how relevant with respect to the topic A is the idea a_1? How relevant with respect to the topic A is the idea a_2? Then, incidentally what is the correlation of a_1 to a_2? Naturally, the greater the relevancy which exists between the speaker's ideas on busing (a_1 and a_2), the greater will be the correlation between these ideas and the topic of busing (A).

In summary, the critical listening component receives its input from the analytic component in the form of a universe of total relevant input portions. These portions are then assigned to topics, issues, or questions and subsequently weighed by the listener with

respect to their degree of relevance (or "correlation") with those topics, issues, or questions. The output, then, assumes the character of the concept illustrated in the preceding diagram. (Figure 1).

CREATIVE LISTENING

The third component of the post-active phase is the creative listening skill. This skill may be operationally defined as a two stage process: synthesis and evaluation. The synthesis process is sparked by the output of the critical listening skill. Once the correlation has been established between relevant input portions and the topic(s), these relevant input portions are then synthesized to yield a mean relevant input factor. For example, consider the following illustration:

$$\bar{a} = \frac{\sum a_1, a_2, \ldots \text{etc.}}{n}$$

where: $\bar{a}$ = mean relevant input factor
$\sum$ = "the sum of ...."
$a_1, a_2, \ldots$ etc. = selected relevant input portions
n = total number of selected relevant input portions

Once the mean input factor ($\bar{a}$) has been synthesized by the listener, it is then correlated with the original topic (A). The following diagram will illustrate this relationship:

Figure 2

$$\bar{a} + A = \overset{100\%\ r}{\boxed{A \mid \bar{a}}}$$ (the "SYNTHESIS PRODUCT")

where: r = correlation
$\bar{a}$ = mean relevant input factor
A = original topic
$\boxed{A \mid \bar{a}}$ = the synthesis product

The second stage of the creative listening skill is the evaluation by the listener of this synthesis product. It is at this point that the effective listener has the opportunity to incorporate the mean relevant input into his original conception of the topic. In other words, his particular perception of the topic, issue, or question may be subject to change as a result of this incorporation. For clarification, we submit the following illustration:

Figure 3

SYNTHESIS PRODUCT (Topic-Input dimer)

EVALUATION PRODUCT (Topic-Input dimer)

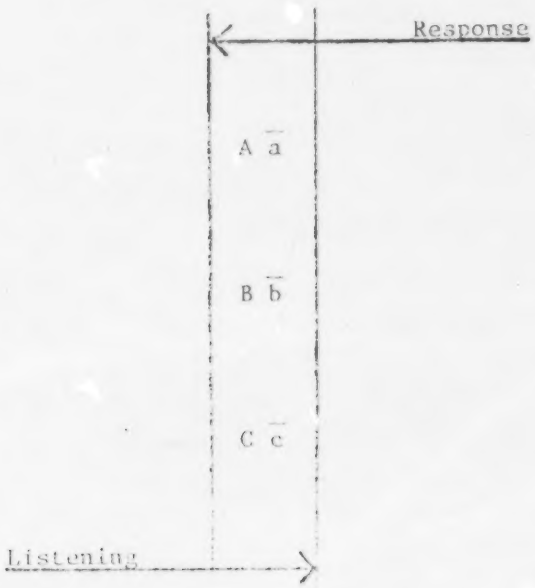
The dotted line in the synthesis product implies that the listener has the opportunity at this point to allow his original perception of the topic to be altered by what he has heard. As a result of this incorporation he will gain new insight and sensitivity to the topic at hand. We, therefore, submit that an educational leader will welcome change or alteration in his perception of the topic(s), whereas an administrator who is no more than an educational manager will not allow his perceptions to be changed. The educational leader, in his open-mindedness, will allow the evolution of the synthesis product into the more desirable evaluation product. On the other hand, the educational manager, in his closed-mindedness, may very well not allow the Snythesis product to adequately evolve into the evaluation product despite the fact that he may have greatly improved his listening skills.

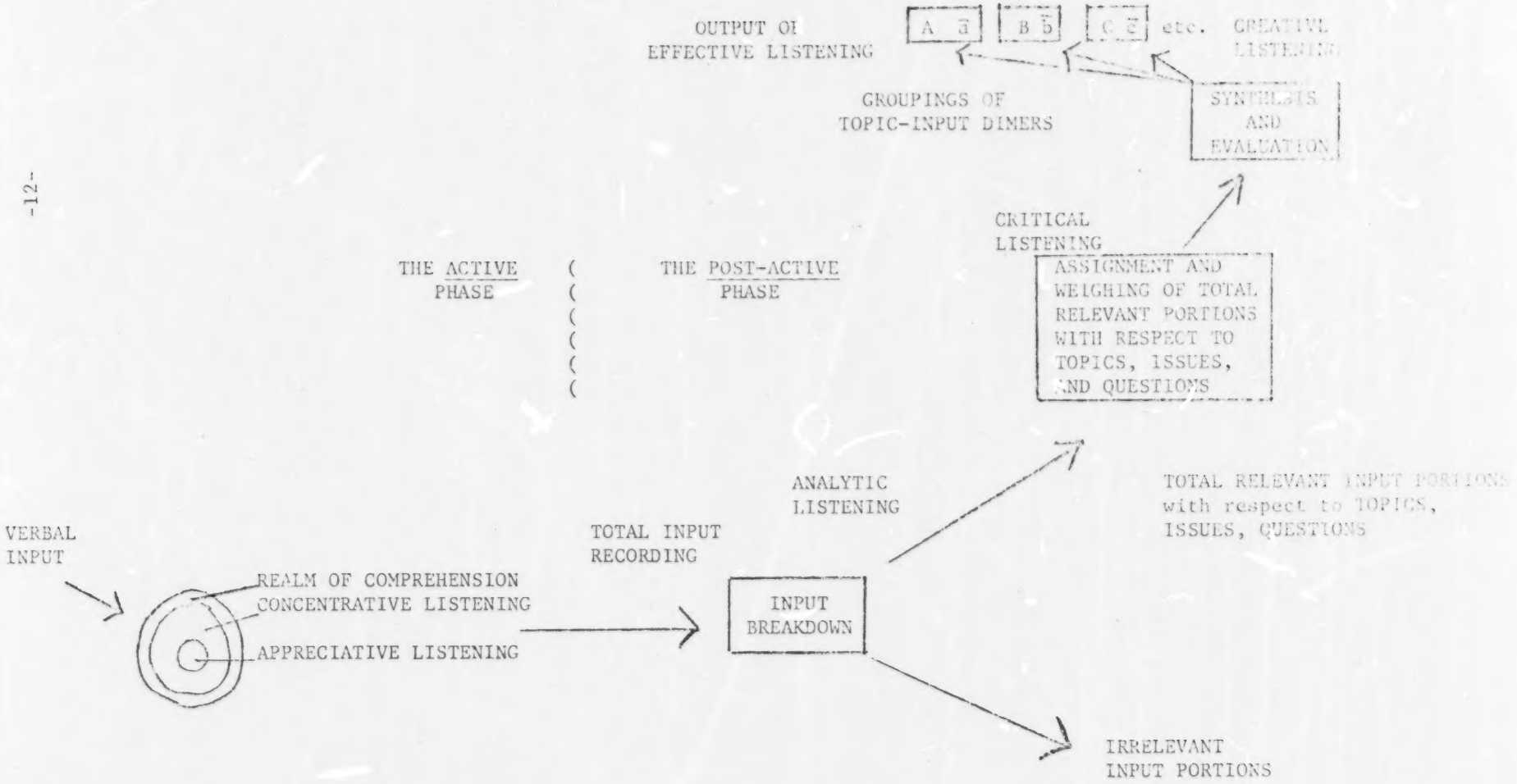
MODEL OUTPUT

The output of the effective listening model, then, is synonymous with the output of the creative listening component. This output consists of evaluative products in the form of "topic-input dimers," a dimer being any theoretical construct consisting of two parts. In addition, we must state that certain common ground exists between effective listening and response as the output of effective listening may well be the input for effective response.

The following illustration is presented for clarification of the relationship between the output of this listening model and response formation.

Figure 4





F L O W D I A G R A M THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
LISTENING MODEL

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that our listening model stops with the formation of the topic-input dimers. This is the departure point between listening and active response formation. It would seem that the listener must, and does, go to completion of our model if effective listening is to occur whether or not a response is forthcoming; however, the dimers or end-products of the listening process would provide fertile ground for the conceptualization necessary for response. Response which is not based upon all of these components could only result in effective, premature response in the form of statements or questions. Furthermore, we feel that well-directed and formulated questions are predicated upon effective listening or upon the additive process involved in these five skills. The response process, however, is a further extension of this model and should be treated elsewhere. Finally, to derive the maximum benefit from the use of this listening model, the educational leader needs more than the mechanical ability to perform these listening skills - he must be open-minded and receptive to fresh, even occasionally alien, ideas.